



An Interview With *Bobby Askew*

Cranes are a critical component of mill operation. When a crane is out of service, production suffers. The skills and knowledge of the crane operator are of utmost importance in keeping cranes — and, ultimately, mills — up and running.

The AIST Annual Crane Symposium is designed for those responsible for cranes and crane service across the industry. The program typically includes presentations on safe work practices and ergonomics, electrical, mechanical, and structural maintenance techniques, crane inspection technologies, and best practices in electric overhead traveling (EOT) crane modernizations, with the goal of making EOT cranes and their runways the safest, most reliable, durable machinery and equipment in the industry.

The AIST Cranes Technology Committee (CTC) is working to increase participation among steel-producing companies. Iron & Steel Technology recently spoke with CTC chair Bobby Askew about his experiences in the industry and his involvement in AIST.

Iron & Steel Technology (I&ST): How did you come to be involved with cranes?

Bobby Askew (B.A.): I applied for a mechanical position with Nucor back in 1999. I had no previous crane experience, but I found them interesting when I was questioned about them in the interview. The mechanical supervisors interviewing me felt I would be a good fit for the crane crew with my background. We were a greenfield mill, and as we were commissioning the cranes during start-up, I was able to learn more about them and how to make the needed repairs.

I&ST: Why are cranes so important to the steel industry?

B.A.: It is all about material handling and maintenance. From our scrap bay through our shipping department, it would be impossible to function without a crane being involved in the movement of our materials or the maintenance of our equipment.

Cranes feed our furnace with scrap. They transport molten ladles of steel to our caster. They are utilized for

moving slabs, doing roll changes in our mill and loading our products onto trucks and rail cars.

Cranes also are the workhorses for our maintenance team when performing daily tasks. Without cranes, we would have to stop our production process in several areas of the mill if they were not operational.

I&ST: Nucor is a major supporter of the Annual Crane Symposium. Can you give an example of a “take-away” from the symposium that Nucor has put into practice?

B.A.: Networking is a perfect example. Within Nucor there are different divisions across the country that make various products. There are several mills that neither I nor my fellow team members would have had a reason to visit or call until we all realized we had a common interest: AIST’s Annual Crane Symposium. Nucor management gives us the opportunity to attend the meeting, and it is our responsibility to bring value home after the trip. Networking is one of the values we bring home.

We discovered, as we started to attend the symposia, that we were meeting other Nucor crane team members

whom we did not know. During the downtime between presentations, we would get together and talk shop. From there, the idea was formed to plan an “Annual Nucor Crane Meeting” and do it the same weekend as the Crane Symposium, since we are all here at the same time.

It turned out to be one of the best things we could have done as a group. Without the Symposium, it might not have happened, definitely not as quickly as it did. We have a huge attendance each June, with representation from most mills. We exchange safety, reliability and upgrading equipment information, along with new, innovative ideas about what the different crane groups in each mill are doing.

The Nucor mills have taken that meeting and grown it into a semi-annual meeting that is located at a mill, which gives us the opportunity to see firsthand how our company partners operate. The most recent semi-annual meetings were at Nucor-Yamato Steel Co. and Nucor Steel Tuscaloosa Inc.

While there is always cost involved in attending the meetings, the paybacks are huge. Communication among the Nucor crane groups is at an all-time high. We exchange emails on a regular basis, from asking whether there is a need for a part that is not available from a supplier to the “have any of you seen this problem” email. We communicate!

I would encourage other crane groups from other companies to try it; it will work for you, too.

I&ST: How long have you been involved in the CTC and why did you originally join?

B.A.: My involvement with the CTC goes back just a few years. I was interested in the committee when I discovered the talent and expertise of the members on the CTC through speaking with several of them at the symposium. I felt it would be a great opportunity for me to grow my knowledge of cranes. I spoke with two fellow Nucor team members who were on the CTC at the time, and they encouraged me to join. I did just that and have been active in it since the first meeting I attended.

I&ST: How has CTC membership benefited you?

B.A.: I have gained valuable knowledge and continue to learn so much from the CTC and its members. Their drive to be the best is inspiring. They commit themselves to AIST and the betterment of crane knowledge and products. I can't think of another volunteer group that large doing so much for cranes.

I&ST: How is the CTC working to grow its membership among producers?

B.A.: This is an area we have recently been discussing as a committee. We need more producer involvement from all industries utilizing cranes. We have an awesome group of supplier members, but we can be a stronger group if we can get members involved that utilize the cranes in their respective businesses.

At the end of the day, we look for key elements in cranes when purchasing, repairing or using them in our facilities. The more conversations we can have across the board about what we need in a crane, the better cranes will become as we grow in the future.

I&ST: What can the CTC (and also the Annual Crane Symposium) offer producers?

B.A.: The CTC and the Annual Crane Symposium offer producers networking, knowledge, problem solving, innovative ideas, and the opportunity to meet and hear from the best people involved in cranes and crane products — not to mention the lifelong friendships from being associated with a great group of people. ♦

